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Sheldon, George.

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Ohio in 1888.





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THE PATHFINDER AT MARIETTA,
OHIO, IN 1888.

BY GEORGE SHELDON.

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THE PATHFINDER AT MARIETTA, OHIO, IN 1888.

BY GEORGE SHELDON.

The public is always responsive to "personal recollections" of distinguished people. Aside from its interest in the tale I have to tell, it seems fitting that an incident in the career of Mrs. Mary A. Livermore, to which I was knowing, should have a permanent record as of historic value in the annals of woman's achievement.

The third week of July, 1888, was a gala time in Marietta, Ohio. The five states carved out of the great Northwest Territory, had sent their most eminent citizens back to Marietta, the maternal hive, to celebrate the centennial of her birth. Governor Foraker and his stirring wife, kept open house during that week, in a fine mansion vacated for the occasion by the public-spirited owner. Tents were pitched upon the spacious lawn, for the governor's staff, and high officers of the state militia. Sentinels in showy uniforms guarded the grounds, day and night. Here were made welcome the distinguished visitors. There were representatives from the states of the great Northwest Territory, and men from the grandmother states, men of national fame who took part in the ceremonies of the week. Senator Evarts of New York, the eloquent but cold and philosophic orator; Senator Daniels the ardent, still Virginia's favorite son; the stately and polished Senator Sherman; General Ewing, the popular idol of Ohio; Professor Butler, the traveller and oriental scholar; Professor Hinsdale, the historian; Bishop Gilmore Governor Smith, Senator Palmer, and a host of other leading men of the great Northwest. Busy among them all was Mrs. Martha J. Lamb, taking notes for the "Magazine of American History."

Apart and apparently aloof from them all, was the calm and dignified Mrs. Mary Livermore. For it had been decreed in the councils of the high-bred women of the city, who were several rounds of the ladder in advance of the men, that the work done by the pioneer women could be represented more fittingly by a woman; and for this office they selected Mrs. Livermore.

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How far this step was in defiance of the "Lords of Creation," does not appear. Marietta was said to be "the richest and slowest of Ohio cities," and this was a radical advance for the place and event. The women had in view Mrs. Livermore's advanced position as a leader in demanding the rights of woman, and they were walking on thin ice; for the woman suffragists had so far, no standing in that stronghold of conservatism. There is no outside word as to this work of the committee of arrangements, but to show the inside object of inviting Mrs. Livermore, I will quote from a letter by one who was apparently on the committee.

"In arranging a program which should properly celebrate the work of the Settlers it was recognized by the Committee that a part of the work done by the pioneer women must be presented by a woman speaker, and an invitation was sent to Mrs. Livermore to fill that honored place. In our correspondence we used the arguments most likely to touch Mrs. Livermore's principles and opinions, as well as to overbalance the penalty of fatigue in a long July journey. To win her consent stress was laid on the fact that at no previous Centennial Celebration of this character, had woman been accorded such prominence as was now intended. It was an advance movement which as a Suffragist, she would, or should, value at its full worth. She would be able to emphasize the work of women, not as mothers only, but as co-workers in founding, nursing and developing the great communities of the Northwest. Of course such a review would be a tribute to woman's power of endurance, and to her preservation, even in hardships, of those gentler forms of life, all too apt to sink from sight in the camps of soldier or pioneer. This was almost too obvious to call for oratory, but experience shows that the obvious was not recognized at all by a large per cent of the history makers."

Through a fortuitous chain of circumstances I had been introduced to the managers of the celebration; had been invited to attend, and been assigned to the hospitality of Mr. W. H. B——, and his charming wife, who were among the leaders of the Committee of One Hundred. Thus I had an opportunity to see some of the inside workings of the machine. The exercises of the celebration were opened on Sunday.

Mrs. Livermore had been advertized in the printed program to appear on the platform on Monday morning. This was changed to Monday evening. An enterprising newspaper man printed an abstract of the address on Tuesday, as having been delivered Monday evening, and said she had a large and interested audience. But through some influence unknown to me, another party was put in her place for Monday evening. This was not an unusual,

nor was it the only break by the reporters. The small office force at command had more matter than it could digest. Frequent and sudden changes in the program occurred, and the contemporary newspaper reports cannot always be depended upon as to the order of events. As has been said, Mrs. Livermore's address had been put off; after the heavy artillery had been discharged as they supposed, another date was fixed upon. It was to be in the evening, the third meeting of the day. On the morning of that day, my hostess appeared to be much disturbed in her mind. Her face was clouded, and she was seen occasionally gazing into vacancy. Presuming on my intimacy in the family, I ventured to inquire the reason of this apparent trouble. What was going amiss? Mrs. B—— frankly told me that she was worrying as to what kind of a reception Mrs. Livermore would receive in Marietta, the stronghold of conservatism. No woman had yet appeared on her public platform. Would anybody go to hear her? Would she be interrupted? abused? allowed to go on? Would she be insulted on the street when recognized? What did I think she could do to help matters along smoothly. Mrs. B—— had evidently been instrumental in bringing this radical woman to Marietta, and the responsibility was weighing heavily. The crucial hour was near. She was in torturing uncertainty as to the outcome. She was slightly relieved when assured that from my knowledge of Mrs. Livermore she need not have the slightest fear as to how the orator would be received by the audience. Regarding the number of hearers, we had no right to expect a large meeting after the gatherings and orations of morning and afternoon, for there was a limit to human endurance and capacity for listening. But get any audience, small or large, face to face with Mrs. Livermore, you need have no doubt whatever of a satisfactory result. There will be no insult, and no interruption, you may be sure of that. Mrs. B—— was grateful for this assurance, but she did not so fully rely upon it as I could wish. She had as little faith in my assurance, as I had sympathy in her troublous fear; she was also very skeptical about getting any audience at all. It may be supposed that Mrs. B—— represented the general feelings of the women, and it was decided, during the day, to open the evening with a procession of the Marietta women in carriages. This was a shrewd scheme, worthy the sharpest wits. The women would all be thus committed to the cause, would give Mrs. Livermore open support, and backing; they would become, at least, the nucleus of an audience, and above all, if worst came to worst, in case of any disturbance, the men of Marietta must rally to the rescue of their wives and daughters.

So at the appointed time a long array of carriages filled with women was drawn up on the street where Mrs. Livermore had been entertained by Mr. and Mrs. L——, ready for the parade. I was among the men who crowded the sidewalk, and noticed some shifting of the occupants. Suddenly I was seized by two marshals, resplendent with the insignia of office, who conducted me to the leading carriage in which Mrs. Livermore was seated, and asked me to enter. I positively refused; told them there was some mistake; that I knew all the arrangements of the affair; not a man but the coachman was to be in the procession. A moment later, the marshals appeared again with smiling faces, saying, "Well, we have orders to put the gentleman from Massachusetts into this carriage."

Perhaps the hearts of the management had failed at the last moment; they could not take the risk of letting Mrs. Livermore go out of sight into unknown hazards without a Massachusetts body guard. So, they may have reasoned, the responsibility will be divided. This was only twenty years ago. With our present light, all these performances seem almost incredible.

The signal given, the procession moved. With the rattle of drums, the braying of brass, the flashing lights and waving flags, we paraded the principal streets. The crowds were orderly, respectful. There were no signs of disturbance. But there was no cheering, no appearance whatever of approval. Doubts must needs arise. What is the meaning of all this machinery? What means this crowd, this silence? Does it bode ill or good? What will the harvest be?

Calm as a mountain lake in the moonlight, sat Mrs. Livermore utterly innocent of anything unusual in the air; not indifferent to the supposed honor paid her, but not having the most distant idea of ill or mischance. She had long been accustomed to the lime light.

She had also been accustomed to crowded houses in the East, and I felt it my duty to prepare her against a sudden disappointment. I dwelt upon the fact of the great meetings day after day, of the two meetings that very day, of a limit to the listening power, and said "we have no right to expect more than a small audience to-night." "How many do you predict?" she at length asked. "You will have just twelve hundred," was the positive reply.

"If I have twelve hundred," she said, "I shall be entirely satisfied. When Senator Evarts closed his eloquent oration he had only —— for I counted them." (Mrs. L—— gave the exact number which I cannot recall, but it was about six or seven hundred).

When the procession reached the front of the great Memorial Auditorium

on the bank of the Muskingum it turned down by one side to reach the platform by the rear entrance. As we passed the first and second of the great tall side doors, there was to be seen within a wide and dreary expanse of empty seats, and I trembled for my reputation as a prophet. But the lower door revealed a compact semicircle of men and women seated before the platform.

"Look there, Mrs. Livermore, there is your twelve hundred I promised," said the prophet. "Yes, there is, just about that, and I am entirely satisfied."

The face of Mrs. B——, which had reminded one of the last quarter of the waning moon, now brightened up a trifle. We passed round to the rear where were men in plenty to help the women up the steps to the waiting room back of the platform. All parties looked pleased, the experiment was so far a success. The women were safe and sound, and an audience was waiting, twelve hundred strong. After a delay of four or five minutes for the women to preen themselves, we passed in to the platform. A wonderful transformation met the eye. We almost ceased to breathe with amazement. Every seat in that vast auditorium was filled, every door was crowded with faces, and on the great platform stood hundreds of the leading men of the Centennial Celebration. Governors crowded United States Senators, Senators elbowed Judges of the Supreme Court and officers of the several states. There even seemed scant room for the women escort. Mrs. B —— and the prophet exchanged swift glances. Her face glowed with the light of a double full moon, if such there could be. Together we looked on an audience of nearly six thousand people, awaiting the speaker in perfect silence. Together we looked upon the quiet but glowing face of Mrs. Livermore. Grand and queenly she stood, apparently the least surprised of us all, as if her feet were now on her native heath.

The silence was not for long. Mrs. Livermore had hardly taken the stand when she seemed to be caught up on the wings of a great enthusiasm, far beyond what I had ever before witnessed. She fully realized the situation; she felt the call to the uttermost, she saw the flood tide of opportunity, and responded magnificently. For an hour and a half she held that vast mass of humanity in the hollow of her hand, and swayed it at her will, as she might wave a silken banner. History, patriotism, reverence for woman, duty, service and sacrifice in the civil and social life of man and the nation, all took on a new form and meaning from her inspired lips. Cold indifference and the chain armor of fortified conservatism were alike melted in her elo-

quent and fervid pleadings for the right. Her strong but musical voice reached every ear in that rapt assembly, and applause from platform and floor filled the air as her eloquent periods enriched her lofty themes. Not one foot-print pointed outward during that long oration; but those standing without pressed steadily in, until every one of the long aisles was packed solidly to the platform, and every inch of standing room about the side doors was but a compact mass of faces with every eye fixed steadfastly on the speaker.

By unquestioned assent Mrs. Livermore's spontaneous outpouring was the event of the week. That night, as all agreed, she stormed the heart and head of Marietta. The backbone of conservatism was damaged beyond repair. Progress in civil and social life succeeded indifference and sloth, and the century-old Marietta entered on a new era of vital thought and action.

The uppermost reason for the invitation of Mrs. Livermore to Marietta has been given in an extract from a correspondent's offering. Another extract from the same source will show the result, as measured by her discerning mind, of the immediate and ultimate effect of this address of Mrs. Livermore. She says: — "The majestic appearance of Mrs. Livermore, her voice and personal presence, were fully equal to the large audience and the spacious platform. From the first word to the last, she held her audience with an ease which implied strength and eloquence hardly drawn upon, — a remarkable exhibition of physical vitality and mental resource. Perhaps," she continues, "it may be asked how much of that spell she worked over the gathered throng, was due to what met the eye, and how much the ear. The indirect influences of Mrs. Livermore's presence on this occasion should not be ignored, however impossible to trace them. So far as the town of Marietta is a measure, while public opinion was fairly ready for speaking by women in the churches and the City Hall, it was a jar to many conservatives, that a woman should be asked to address delegates from five states, and an audience up in the thousands. When the event came to hand, when the woman filled her part victoriously, and the people 'cried for more,' one more nail had been driven in the coffin of medievalism. Whatever advance in woman's share of civic and national life takes form in this great Middle West, while few may appreciate the pathfinder, certain it is that a wide and upward way began, and continues from Mrs. Livermore's address at Marietta in 1888,"

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